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The Spectator

Publishing the Truth, From Good Motives and For Justifiable Ends

Pres. Tepper affirms support for Hamilton core values amdist attacks on higher education

By Henry Meisner '26
NEWS CO-EDITOR

On Tuesday, April 29, President Steven Tepper appeared at a community gathering outside Sadove Student Center to affirm the college's support of all students amidst attacks on transgender, international and undocumented people alongside sanctions on academic grants and funding. This speech was made as part of a greater Crossroads event, which included a variety of food trucks and music along Martin's Way outside of Sadove.

The event kicked off at 11 a.m. with students and faculty talking amongst themselves and eating food from the myriad of food trucks present. At 12 p.m., Tepper took the stage to address the crowd.

Tepper began, sharing with the crowd, "This is really a chance for us to gather, to affirm who we are, to celebrate our value in the world…I feel so privileged and honored to be part of this community."

Recent executive orders and executive initiatives have specifically targeted transgender people and immigrants within the U.S. These orders have removed federal Title IX protections for transgender people, banned transgender athletes from women's sports, revoked colleges' and universities' classification as a "sensitive location" and sent ICE agents to arrest college students at Tufts and Columbia.

Addressing these issues, Tepper said, "There are members of our community that in the current environment have been particularly under attack, and I just want to personally say and affirm my support for our trans community, for our students who come from abroad or international students and all of us who have friends or family members that may be undocumented. All of you bring extraordinary gifts to this community. We are better off because of you."

PHOTO COURTESY OF ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (LEFT) AND THE AMERICAN ACADEMY (RIGHT)

The AAC&U and the American Academy produced the letter "A Call for Constructive Engagement" in conjunction with various college and university presidents, including Tepper.

"We are a diverse community. We are a complicated community. More than 60 countries represented, every imaginable human being is on this campus, from every socioeconomic background, every religious perspective, every race, every ethnicity, every gender, every sexuality. It takes a lot to figure out how to curate that community so that we trust each other…We cannot allow others to dictate how we build that community, as long as we do it lawfully, as long as we don't discriminate. We know best."

Issues of academic freedom were also addressed during Tepper's speech. Faculty and students at Hamilton have already been affected by recent cuts to federal funding, leading to a loss of grants and academic opportunities, as previously covered by *The Spectator*. Recently, $2.2 billion was withheld from Harvard for not complying with federal demands to restructure leadership, change admission policy and audit views of diversity on campus, according to the Associated Press.

"Our faculty have to be free to teach what they want to teach and how they want to teach it without any interference from our political officials. That's what makes us great: freedom of expression. We have got to be free to speak to the moments, to the moments today, whatever we think is necessary, without fear of persecution, without fear of sanction. We can do that on this campus," Tepper said.

Speaking of the sanctions on universities and colleges, Tepper said, "Now it seems like today [that] we're in a climate where some people have forgotten that lesson about how powerful these institutions are for securing our democracy. Or maybe they haven't forgotten. Maybe they are intentionally remembering the power of higher education to preserve democracy because they have other intentions around preventing liberty or about securing power."

He continued, "We are also joining with other colleges and universities to defend these core principles. We signed an amicus brief to defend the rights of our international students to express themselves freely. We were one of the first to sign the letter that came out from AAC&U [Association of American Colleges and Universities] and the American Academy. Now, more than 500 colleges have signed that we stand together. So we will not bend as a community...We will stand together. We will celebrate what we do. We will advance, always advance, together."

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On Awkwardness

Stroup '26 discusses Professor Plakias' new book that explores the ambiguity of awkwardness. **page 7**

SGA announces 2025-2026 election results

By Erin Delaney ’26
NEWS CO-EDITOR

On Wednesday, April 30, the Hamilton College Student Government Alliance (SGA) announced the results of elections for the 2025-2026 academic year. The SGA President is Anna Gnapp ’26 and the SGA Vice President is Chayti Biswas ’27, with 488 votes collectively. The electronic ballot was sent out Monday, April 28 at 1:00 pm, and remained open until Tuesday, April 29 at 1:00 pm.

Elected SGA President Anna Gnapp ’26 has served as the SGA President this year and as the Class of 2026 President. She is a member of the Varsity Women’s Basketball team and works as a research assistant in the Government Department’s Policing Lab on campus.

Elected SGA Vice President Chayti Biswas ’27 served as SGA’s Student Organization Chair last year and as the Vice President this year. “It has been an honor and a privilege for me to work with incredible students, student organization leaders, faculty and so many more who make Hamilton College run,” she said in a statement.

“We’ve championed key initiatives to enhance student life–securing free laundry starting in the 2025-2026 academic year, installing water fountains in residential spaces, expanding student parking access and successfully advocating for the removal of Glenview,” Gnapp and Biswas wrote in a joint statement. “We will continue advocating for more mental health and wellness programming and addressing concerns within student-facing departments to ensure students’ academic and emotional needs are supported.”

Class Presidents are Quentin Messer ’26 (98 votes), Anna Williams ’27 (100 votes) and Isabel Harvey ’28 (93 votes).

Class of 2026 President Quentin Messer has been a member of SGA since his first year at Hamilton. “By using polling, feedback forms and engaging digital content, I will facilitate Senior Pub Nights, Senior Week events and potential exclusive off-campus events that reflect the energy and preferences of our grade,” he wrote in a statement.

Elected Class of 2027 President Anna Williams ’27 is a member of the women’s basketball team, the current Class of 2027 President, an orientation leader and a volunteer at the Hamilton Association for Volunteering, Outreach, and Charity (HAVOC). “I’m currently collaborating with stakeholders on a project to revamp the mural in McEwen and will continue pursuing initiatives that revitalize campus spaces,” she wrote in a statement.

Elected Class of 2028 President Isabel Harvey ’28 is on the women’s soccer team at Hamilton and a number of campus clubs. “During my time at SGA, I want to make Hamilton a better place for all students and faculty, focusing on blurring the line between students with various athletic and artistic interests,” she said in a statement.

Class Representatives for the class of 2026 are Cathy Carlson ’26, with 58 votes, and Maizley Tone ’26, with 87 votes.

Elected Class of 2026 Representative Carlson participated in the Spring 2024 Justice Lab and Leadership Institute, and held the position of Class Representative last year. “One of my plans for next year is an International Food Fair that brings together the community to celebrate the diverse backgrounds of the student body,” she wrote in a statement. “Students can share their food, wear their cultural attire and perform dances that reflect their heritage.”

Tone is a member of the Hamilton women’s lacrosse team and has served on the athletic council for the team. She has also been the President of the OneLoveClub for the past two years, helping to educate the community about domestic violence and identifying unhealthy relationships.

Class Representatives for the class of 2027 are Keira Joshi ’27, with 107 votes, and Maddie Buck ’27, with 117 votes.

Joshi is a current Class Representative, as well as a member of the women’s golf team. “As your current class representative, I helped coordinate Declaration Day this semester–a successful event that reflected our class’ diverse interests and encouraged our school spirit,” Joshi said in a statement.

Buck is on the women’s soccer team at Hamilton. “My experience as an athlete with non-athlete roommates gives me a unique insight into a more general idea of what life is like for students on campus,” she said in a statement. “I feel as if there is an unnecessary amount of division that is cultivated by limited on-campus activities and opportunities that I would love to address.”

Class Representatives for the class of 2028 are Amelia Petty ’28, with 81 votes, and Layla Chen ’28, with 65 votes.

Petty is currently on the SGA executive board as the Student Organizations Chair and is on the varsity women’s rowing team. “During my time on the executive board, I witnessed a large disconnect between SGA committees, the central council and student body,” she said in a statement. “My experiences have encouraged my desire to advocate for our true class concerns and provide an outlet for communication between many different communities, organizations and groups on campus.”

Chen is a member of the Asian Student Union and SGA. “I intend to push for more social spaces for students to utilize to connect with the community and expand variety in the dining halls as well as maintain transparent communication between the alliance and the student population,” she said in a statement.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNA GNAPP

SGA President Anna Gnapp ’26 recently provided an introduction for former President Barack Obama before his conversation with President Steven Tepper on April 3.

April 30, 2025

Hamilton students produce comprehensive report on youth gun violence in Utica

By Erin Delaney '26
NEWS CO-EDITOR

Last week, Hamilton College's Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center released a comprehensive report titled "Youth Gun Violence in Utica, New York: Causes, Context, and Prevention." This report was prepared by students in the Center's Fall 2024 Justice Lab, a semester-long program for a cohort of 12-16 students involving four integrated courses on complex societal challenges such as criminal justice reform, immigration and asylum and human rights and civil rights.

For the Fall 2024 semester's Justice Lab, Profs. Frank Anechiarico, Marianne Janack, Jeff McArn and Judge Ralph Eannace (ret) taught four connected courses on the root causes of youth gun violence in the local area, researching best practices for addressing this violence, investigating alternative forms of justice and writing and reflecting on their own experiences of fear and safety. Former Oneida County District Attorney Scott McNamara acted as a Community Partner to the Justice Lab.

The beginning of the report focuses on the social environment, putting the issue of youth gun violence in Utica, New York into local context.

"Economic disparities significantly influence crime rates, particularly in post-industrial cities like Utica. The decline of manufacturing jobs over the last five decades has left many residents struggling to secure stable employment, leading to increased poverty and social dislocation," the report says. "The resulting concentration of poverty perpetuates crime and limits opportunities for upward mobility (Chetty et al., 2014). Without access to quality education and employment, youth are more likely to engage in behaviors that increase their risk of involvement in gun violence."

Survey data collected in 2024 by the Hamilton College Levitt Center and Colgate University reveal a strong relationship between economic status and perceptions of safety in Utica. According to the data, individuals earning less than $50,000 annually are more likely to report worsening economic conditions and heightened concerns about crime than those in higher income brackets. Similarly, data suggest that perceptions of safety vary significantly across racial groups. Black and Hispanic residents report greater concern over crime in their neighborhoods compared to white residents.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZACH STENAK

Justice Lab student Ethan McKellop '25 shares research findings with Family Court Judge Randall Caldwell during a poster session in December 2024.

"Judge Randal Caldwell, who presides over the Teen Accountability Court (TAC), noted that nearly all high-risk youth assessed by the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) exhibit histories of childhood trauma, abuse, or neglect. This trauma, left unaddressed, manifests in aggressive behavior, delinquency, and eventual entanglement in violent activities," the report says.

The report notes that the effectiveness of school resource officers largely depends on the training they receive. While some states mandate specialized training for officers assigned to schools, others provide little to no guidance. According to the report "there is still no statewide requirement for de-escalation training, trauma-informed policing, or crisis intervention techniques related to adolescent mental health."

Currently, Utica employs school protection officers and school resource officers. According to the students' research, the school protection officers primarily focus on perimeter checks and surveillance to address external threats. In contrast, school resource officers work within the schools but do not consistently receive specialized training in juvenile policing.

"These officers volunteer for shifts, leading to frequent turnover and a lack of sustained relationships with students and faculty (Finn et al., 2005b, p.7)," the report says.

The report offers a series of recommendations, including reviving gun violence prevention grants, enhancing community policing strategies, establishing a police-community trust initiative, increasing access to Teen Accountability Courts, expanding alternative sentencing programs and establishing permanent School Resource Officers trained in adolescent mental health and conflict resolution.

Utica Mayor Michael P. Galime commented, "The Utica Police Department prides itself on our accreditation standards, training, and use of bleeding edge technology. This is reflected in how our officers interact with and protect our community. As always, the body of work provided by Hamilton College and the Levitt Center for Public Affairs is an example of their work proving its worth in leading our city into the future."

"With respect to this report, we have added confidence that the direct police work we perform, and the collaborative efforts we undertake to mitigate youth gun violence indirectly through outreach and community involvement are making a difference—with added benefit of reflecting on how we can iteratively improve our efforts in serving the City," he said in a statement.

The full report is available through Hamilton College's Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center and online.

EDITORIAL

April 30, 2025

Dear Campus Community,

The sun is out, the weather is warm, and it is a good time to be a student on the Hill! Unless, of course, you are knee-deep in studying, writing term papers, or preparing thesis presentations. But nonetheless, we encourage you all to lie down in the sun for as long as you can, like an old sailor smiling blissfully in the eye of a hurricane.

With barely a week until our last day of classes, The Spectator encourages its readers to take their eyes off the ball as much as possible and to focus on things more important than work. Spend time with friends! Go pick flowers in the Glen! Smell the sweet dew on Minor Field in the morning! Read a book on the Kirkland Green! Play Spikeball on KTSA lawn! In ten years, you won't be saying, "I wish I didn't flunk that class my senior year and have to do another semester," you'll be saying "I wish I played one more game of Spikeball with my friends."

If you're looking for more forms of distractions, there's a boatload of events and activities going on around campus this weekend! Sabina Feder presents her thesis at 4:00 on Friday, May 2, entitled, "Stirring the Pot: Redefining Food Security Work in Utica" in KJ 101. After that, head over to the Theater Department Senior Projects, which begin at 6:00 in the Barrett Lab Theater. Then on Saturday night, check out the Events Barn to celebrate GSU's 51st birthday party!

Whether or not it feels real, the year is almost over! Remember: clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose.

Love,
The Spectator

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Celebrating 157 years,
we *were first published as* The Hamilton Campus *in 1866*.

The Spectator

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The Spectator's Letter to the Editor section is designed to be a forum for the entire Hamilton community to discuss and debate campus, local, national, and global issues. Pieces published in the section express the opinion of the individual writers and are not necessarily the opinions of *The Spectator*, its editors or the Media Board.

Letters to the Editor are welcome from all students, alumni/ae, faculty, friends of the college, and Hamilton community members.

The Spectator has the following policies for submission:

1. Submissions are due by 10:00 p.m. on the Monday before publication. The editors reserve the right to refuse any late submissions.
2. Letters should be no longer than 500 words. The editors reserve the right to cut off letters at 500 words.
3. Letters submitted anonymously will not be printed.
4. *The Spectator* reserves the right not to publish any letter it deems inappropriate for publication.
5. If a piece is determined to be libelous, an unwarranted invasion of privacy, or an unnecessary and/or unwarranted ad hominem or personal attack, it will not be published.

About Us

The Hamilton College Spectator, *publication number USPS 612-840, is published weekly by the Hamilton College Student Media Board while classes are in session. For more information e-mail spec@hamilton.edu. Our offices are located on the second floor of the Sadove Student Center. The deadline for advertisements is Monday the week of publication. For further information, please e-mail specads@hamilton.edu.*

April 30, 2025

This Week in Hamilton History: Affirmative Action talks on campus over 30 years ago

by Anoushka Aswin '25
CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hamilton College, Clinton, New York — May 1, 1992 — Volume XXIV, Number 12

HAMILTON PRAYS AS NATIONAL RIOTS RAGE—Last night, over 250 members of the Hamilton Community gathered in the Chapel to hold a vigil for peace. The national tragedy touched sensitive nerves here, as a series of racial-motivated incidents have marred campus events in recent weeks. In Los Angeles, at least 18 are reported dead, and 450 more reported injured. In Atlanta, a peaceful vigil turned to violence.

Part Two: Affirmative action and the Administration

By Stephanie Van Allen '94 and Beth Merrill '94
SPECTATOR EDITORS

Issues surrounding affirmative action policies on college campuses have drawn national attention over the past year. Conservative critic Dinesh D'Souza (see interview on this page) authored a controversial book criticizing affirmative action, sparking a wave of equally as controversial rebuttals from the political Left.

What are Hamilton's policies? What is the rationale? Both student and administrative leaders generally say affirmative action-style policies at Hamilton are important—and here to stay.

The issue of multiculturalism among the faculty is as salient as it is among students. Hamilton has instituted an Affirmative Action program for the past three years to encourage hiring among minorities.

The Affirmative Action Statement says that Hamilton is dedicated to increasing the number of "women and members of minority groups on the faculty, administration and staff." It also states "we will continue our efforts to ensure an environment that is conducive to the recruitment and retention of women and minority group members, including working conditions, compensation, and opportunities for advancement."

There are currently fifteen full time faculty members who are considered minorities, although not all of them are American citizens. Two faculty members, both Turkish, are described as "multicultural," but they do not qualify as part of the Affirmative Action program.

According to Associate Dean of the Faculty Deborah Pokinski,, the policy is not what people expect of an Affirmative Action plan, but "all of (her) colleagues have taken it seriously."

There are currently faculty members who represent the Hispanic, Latino, African American, Caribbean American, Asian American, Asian, Turkish, and Indian cultures. Pokinski did, however, cite a lack of Native American faculty. Three multicultural professors are currently tenured and two more will become tenured next year. The three tenured professors are Jean D'Costa, Vincent Odamtten, and Santiago Tejerina-Canal. Shelley Haley and Chandra

Please see ***multiculture*** *on page 5*

Special Report:
Minorities at Hamilton

Spectator exclusive:
Renowned scholars discuss race, ethnicity on college campuses

Interviews conducted by Paul Earle '93

As part of the Minorities at Hamilton series, *Spectator* has interviewed four of America's leading scholars on the subject of race on campus. Representing the political right are **William F. Buckley, Jr.**, who is considered the "Godfather of Conservatism" and is Editor and Founder of the *National Review*; and **Dinesh D'Souza**, a research fellow with the conservative American Enterprise Institute and author of the controversial book Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus, now available on paperback. Representing the left are **Catharine Stimpson**, who has debated D'Souza and is Dean of the Graduate School at Rutgers University; and our own **Maurice Isserman**, a history professor who has written numerous books on the American Left. The Buckley and Isserman interviews were conducted in person; Stimpson and D'Souza spoke with us over the phone.

Spectator: *At Hamilton, and across college campuses nationwide, there is a greater proportion of student and administrative support groups for minority interests today than ever before. Is this trend an indication of a necessary sense of minority awareness or a move toward separatism?*

Buckley: To answer that question plausibly, you have to ask whether you are engaged in an act *contranaturum*, and therefore, any efforts in that direction would be synthetic. I tend to feel that there is more race consciousness of the kind that ought *not* to be welcomed, as a result of these self indulgent programs that otherwise would not have been.

D'Souza: Of course, there is a natural impulse toward separatism. This often happens when people want to associate and 'hang out' with others like them. But the question is whether the administration should encourage or discourage social separatism. Students of different heritage should be brought together, not pitted against each other. Students should stay away from fragmentation and balkanization.

Stimpson: The most important development is is a sheer increase in demographic diversity. It varies, but it is particularly strong in the West, Southwest South and Illinois. We have seen a valuable increase in racial and ethnic diversity. It's inevitable that you see an increase in organizations devoted to these concerns. In fact, it's not only inevitable,

Please see ***interviews*** *on page 4*

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMILTON COLLEGE LIBRARY

The Spectator **reported on the issue of affirmative action on Hamilton's campus on May 1, 1992 and conducted interviews with scholars.**

While we at *The Spectato*r and our readers are always interested in learning about current events, we find it valuable to take a look back in Hamilton history to learn about the events and issues our campus found important.

In *The Spectator'*s reporting on affirmative action at Hamilton 33 years ago, "both student and administrative leaders generally say affirmative action-style policies at Hamilton are important—and here to stay."

On the front page of the issue, members of the Hamilton community are seen holding a vigil after the 1992 Los Angeles and Atlanta riots over the acquittal of four police officers who used excessive force on Rodney King. Recent political events underscore the discussions focusing on race-conscious admissions.

At the time, *The Spectator* interviewed two scholars on the "political right" and two on the left. History professor Maurice Isserman was one of the interviewees in favor of affirmative action policies. The conversations mimic those recently held on campus, with those against affirmative action arguing for using socioeconomic status instead of race.

Students were also interviewed as part of the discussion of "multiculturalism" on campus. The president of the Black and Latinx Student Union at the time referenced that students were required to take a course in the "*knowledge of others*" category, perhaps similar to the current SSIH requirement. However, the student noted that "knowledge must 'come from both inside and outside of the classroom, in both informal and formal settings.'"

Diverse representation among faculty was important for students and the administration as well. There were 15 full-time faculty members who were "considered minorities," and many students expressed a desire for this number to increase. Karen Green, Director of Multicultural Affairs at the time, stated that because of student and staff support for diversity initiatives, "We are laying the groundwork for a Hamilton in the 21st century."

For those interested in reading the rest of the article, old issues can be found on the Hamilton College Library's archive website.

April 30, 2025

Senior Spotlight with Rachel Lion

by Sarafina Madden '26
FEATURES EDITOR

How are you feeling with graduation nearly six weeks away?

I think it's nerve-wracking. I mean to be honest, it still feels like a regular finals week. But it does feel weird that it's the last finals week. I don't think graduation is going to hit until I submit my thesis and I'm done not just with this semester but college in general. I want it to be senior week because I want to be done with the semester but at the same time that means that I have to leave.

Do you feel like you've changed over the course of your time at Hamilton?

Oh, yes. I think a lot of my class came in from COVID. It's insane to think that freshman year we were wearing masks and to see where we are now. I think I've matured a lot in that I can set my priorities in my relationships and my friends. It's been super cool to grow up with these people around me. Something super cool about college is when you're living with people you get to go through stuff with them. College is the first time you really have the choice to choose who you want to be and who you want to associate yourself with.

What advice would you give to students in the grades below you about how to get the most out of their Hamilton experience?

Don't procrastinate your work, but who actually does that? That's BS. But also try not to get caught up in the day to day stresses and try to keep the bigger picture in mind. I'm looking outside right now but it's so nice out and I am stressed about work but maybe I'll just go outside and lie down in the grass for a little. So be willing to put down your work for a little. I don't know after graduation when I'll be in a place where I can walk to see one of my friends in thirty seconds. Make the most out of the fact that we live in a very nuclear space and you can get up within five minutes of being somewhere doing something.

What do you think makes Hamilton special?

I think our size. It really feels like home a lot of the time. I love that I can show up at McEwen at 12 and even if I didn't make lunch plans with anyone I know someone is going to be there. I think the isolation is nice sometimes. We become a community because we have nothing else to do. I mean it's also a great school. I have taken awesome classes here and I really love the professors and the relationships we have with them. And also how willing students are to help one another. We are very supportive of one another.

What has been a meaningful extracurricular experience at Hamilton?

I've been doing water polo for three seasons now and I did rugby last semester. I think club sports are so fun because everyone is working toward a common goal but it's also silly and fun no one actually cares that much because it's a club sport. It has given structure to my routine. It's such a good time to expend physical energy and be with friends.

Is there a particular moment that you remember when you realized that Hamilton was a place that you belonged?

I think it was actually when I was abroad, funnily enough. I was in Paris and one of my friends called me and they were here and even though I was in Paris I was like aw I miss that place—the realization that there were people and things here I really missed. It's really on us to make Hamilton home. You have to make those friendships and make your room feel like your own. I still have that feeling of a homecoming when I come back from breaks. I just drop my stuff off at the foot of my bed.

What are three of your favorite memories from your your time at Hamilton?

I love move-in day. I'm an orientation leader. As a leader you're up super early and you're dragging suitcase and fridges. There is something so communal about it. That's definitely one. My freshman fall was my first finals week and I remember being super stressed about an essay I had due. I was on FaceTime with one of my friends in the class and we started giggling at one point—it was 3 a.m.—we were out of it completely. It was a moment of, like, oh my God why are we doing this right now. But just having someone there with you. And we were like, 'how do you do citations again?' I also just love getting breakfast with people because in high school it's such a lonely experience but at Hamilton it's a thing people do. It's just a nice way to start the day.

What are you excited about for post-grad?

Probably living somewhere bigger. I am not sure where I am going to be living. I think there are pros to the isolation of Hamilton. We are very dependent on cars here, and I am excited to live somewhere where I can just walk down the street to a supermarket. I really enjoyed being in such a small campus for my college experience, but it's not something I want for the rest of my life. It makes it such a tight community and I don't know if I would have been as close with people if I had gone to school in a city, but I feel ready to be somewhere bigger. I am also excited to not have homework. No grades. I'm excited for the nice nap after I submit everything and then figuring out what to do with my life.

What is the most valuable lesson you've gotten out of your time at Hamilton?

People are really everything. That's cheesy, but it's true. I don't really remember the classes I took freshman year or the sports that I was playing. I think in two to three years I won't really remember much about the day-to-day problems I experienced here, but I will remember the people I met. Sometimes I am having a bad day and just remembering my roommates are home and we can just talk before I go to bed.

PHOTO CREDIT: RACHEL LION

April 30, 2025

Prof. Plakias breaks the *Awkward* silence

by Meg Stroup '26
FEATURES EDITOR

During the height of the 2020 Pandemic, socialization took unprecedented forms. Outdoor barbecues with a requirement that everyone wear a mask, holiday celebrations via Zoom and picnics with parties a yardstick a way from one another became commonplace. It was in this landscape that Hamilton College Philosophy Professor Alexandra Plakias delved into the concept of awkwardness. Originally Plakias had planned to tackle the question of awkwardness in the form of a paper but through her research she decided to expand her project into a book.

On Wednesday April 30, professors, philosophy students and others filed into the Burke Library 24-hour room to listen to Professor Plakias speak about her recently published book *Awkwardness: A Theory*.

Plakias began by reflecting on the etymology of the word awkwardness. The Old English origin of the word awkward is "look the wrong way," she explained. It is a state of being out of sync with our surroundings: a form of social disorientation. Plakias characterizes awkwardness as a friction in a typically frictionless interaction. More generally, awkwardness ensues when people lack a social script.

She explained that social scripts provide cognitive maps of events and how they might unfold. Social scripts provide us with norms, stereotypes and dialogues. They also provide deviation: a way of navigating when a social situation takes an unprecedented turn. She identified our dependency on others when it comes to successfully navigating social scripts. We rely on others to read the social cues that we are conveying and reacting accordingly. She used the example of making small talk at a dinner party, if you are cracking jokes to make small-talk and the other person is not laughing… that would be awkward.

According to Plakias, awkwardness emerges out of humans' strong desire to achieve social acceptance. She was interested in exploring how this yearning for social validation from others influences how people navigate social situations. "I have been interested in cases where we have a moral reason to do something but there are social pressures not to," said Plakias. She wanted to explore questions like why we feel such pressure to be polite and why we care about social discomfort.

Plakias strove to dispel the misconception that awkwardness is an intrinsic problem. She argues that people are not awkward, but rather situations are. "We should be careful in how we attach awkwardness and how we attribute the source of the awkwardness," said Plakias. The problem with categorizing someone as an "awkward person" is that it is "problematically ambiguous." We risk attributing awkwardness to people based on power structures that grant some legitimacy based on external factors out of their control, like gender or disability, and "othering" people in the process. To ascribe a person with the label of "awkward," is to alienate them. The word is subtly insidious by virtue of its ambiguity and currency in casual conversation. No one bats an eye when a person off-handedly calls a person awkward. But to Plakias, this labeling, while seeming innocent, poses a great social risk.

She also highlighted the idea that awkwardness reflects some form of "privilege." The "Silicon Valley nerd" is exempt from the negative stigma around awkwardness, and it is instead a "social flex." Even as an "awkward" person this sort of individual can still garner social respect. Whereas, Plakias mentioned, women are tasked with the greater burden of navigating awkward situations. "They are expected to fill in for men's awkwardness with exceptional social skills," said Plakias.

She drew the important distinction between awkwardness and embarrassment. Embarrassment is an emotion while awkwardness is something that happens. Embarrassment describes a scripted response to a "benign violation of a social norm." She called embarrassment a "repair emotion." Blushing, for example, is a noticeable way for someone to illustrate the uncomfortable nature of a situation. Awkwardness, instead, is a "freeze," and something that people may not know how to get out of. She explained how these two concepts have different causes, so they have different remedies as well. Embarrassment is something that we want to avoid, while confronting awkwardness can involve bettering social scripts.

Plakias wanted to know why awkwardness bothers us so much. She suggested being perceived as awkward somehow indicates that you don't know something that you are supposed to, and that you are an outsider, which can be very stressful. She explained the socially constructed ideal that successful socializing is supposed to appear effortless. Mentioning the concept of the "try hard," those whose effort to succeed in a social situation is evident have come to be perceived in a negative light. This person's effort somehow identifies them as an "outsider." Table manners are another prime example of how social norms can be used to "other" people. Manners can be used to "erect boundaries," said Plakias. She joked that all of the intricacies of table manners are almost purposefully exclusionary.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMILTON COLLEGE

Professor Plakias teaches classes on moral theory, food philosophy and religion. Her research interests lie in moral psychology.

Awkwardness can also be a useful tool. Plakias explained that it can be "a way of calling out the unstated assumptions in a question or joke." She used the example of a distasteful comment at a dinner party. The awkward silences indicate the social unacceptability or rudeness of someone's comment, without the need to explicitly address it. Another positive aspect of awkwardness is how it shows that you care about people around you.

Plakias emphasized that "awkwardness is not a personal failing, but an opportunity for growth." She argued that awkwardness is an inevitable part of changing social norms, and should not be confused with a personality trait or emotion. She has considered furthering her exploration on social pressures and moral dynamics through researching what makes someone charismatic versus cringe. Plakias noted that charisma indicates a person's ability to improvise a "social script." Plakias will continue to explore the theatrics involved in socializing, and the intersections of psychology and moral theory.

The Democratic party must reinvent itself

by Matthew Collins '25
OPINION EDITOR

One of Winston Churchill's more famous public statements is his reference to the aphorism that democracy is the worst system of government—that is, excepting all the others. While this adage is tried and, I believe, ultimately true, this line of argumentation hardly makes for an emotionally compelling vision, especially in these paranoid years of impermeable self-affirmation and dreams of utopia. There is little consolation found in examining one's own disappointing circumstances and proclaiming all alternatives worse, even if such a statement maps onto truth. Bloodless justifications will always seem ill-fitting for a system so easily bent to the passions of its participants; democracy is a fickle beast.

Among the most psychologically frustrating aspects of a democratic system is the lack of external blame findable in a free and fair election. Our futures are in our hands, but so are our failures. If one cannot reach the masses where they lie, one's coalition need only look in the mirror to identify the culprits. This is a bitter pill to swallow, so much so that crying foul can appear a comforting alternative. The Democratic Party has thankfully rejected this particular fantasy, especially considering the seductiveness it could very well possess in the eyes of such a large yet paradoxically unpopular coalition. Indeed, although hindsight is bound to augment any analysis of the most recent presidential election, the Democrats' fruitless laboring to move the hearts of voters has become their most crippling inadequacy.

Granted, not all of this difficulty comes from methodological flaws. The Democratic Party is a big-tent party, which naturally allows for disagreement and divergence among party members, and some degree of intra-party discourse enables the party to remain responsive to changing electoral landscapes. Over the past decade, however, Democrats have developed something of an obsession with figuring out the layout of Trumpian America, pouring countless hours of time, effort and worry into divining the desires of the American public and whether they can fulfill such desires while maintaining their moral integrity. These efforts have spawned countless think-pieces ascribing some great all-explaining factor or another—be it bigotry, bankruptcy or boredom—to the American people in a vain attempt to explain the bizarreness of our current landscape. Such trawling is of limited use; at some point, it becomes a fool's errand unless one also plays an active role in shaping such a landscape.

This is the single most important flaw present in the Democratic Party today. The party functionaries are horrible at broadcasting a unified message, as are the various journalists and activists that make up its chattering class. On the rare occasion that they take the initiative, they lack the necessary persistence and conviction; some even seek to undermine whatever narratives do permeate the public consciousness, convinced of their own brilliance and negligent of popular opinion. They watch the American electorate dine on the messaging their political opponents whip up, often partaking themselves, yet decline to provide any meaningful substitute of their own. The most obvious comparison is to Plato's cave; Democrats spend much of their time trying to analyze the public's reactions to the shapes they see on the cave walls, while the Republican Party devotes its time to manufacturing those shapes, separate from reality. In a media landscape whose relationship to the truth is increasingly tenuous, this pattern is a political death wish.

The median American independent identifies their Democratic counterparts largely through the lens of 2020, where the party's loudest members were also its most radical and its least pliable or personable. Take a stroll through news articles from five years ago, and one will discover a left-liberal milieu scarcely recognizable to today. Vacillations between rigidity and flippancy on public safety and eroded public trust in Democrats. The single-mindedness and enforced moral purity of left-liberal elites and professional activists robbed the party of any trace of cool or congeniality, rendering it the playground of rich, joyless squares in the eyes of the American public instead of the vanguard of public safety and scourge of racism. Irrespective of one's own relationship to these policies, at least some of which I believe had real merit, the overwhelmingly negative public perception of Democrats owes no small part to this particular caricature that refuses to die, and which certain dissident elements of the party seem bewilderingly eager to resurrect.

Common wisdom will tell you that the lack of a steady hand behind the Democrats' political process cost them the last presidential election. This is false. The Democratic Party lost the election some eighteen months beforehand, as soon as they tried to react to existing narratives about the nation's financial state instead of standing beside and boasting about what was, by the start of 2024, the strongest national economy on planet Earth by the widest margin since the end of World War II. I shall refrain from more serious defenses of the Biden presidency here, as they are tangential to the topic at hand; suffice to say that he did, in my opinion, an altogether brilliant job, yet public perception of him remained staunchly negative.

Conservative commentators and news sources portrayed him as feeble and his decisions as disastrous, yet Democrats rolled over and refused to stand by the administration implementing their own policies; some, particularly among the alternate Blue Dog and progressive fringes of the party, seemed eager to take relentless potshots at the man. This promptly allowed for pervasive Republican critiques, including ones that did not map to economic reality and which therefore were easily refutable by late 2023, to define the Biden presidency in the eyes and ears of the public. By the time Joe Biden renounced his status as the Democratic nominee and Kamala Harris proceeded as his heir apparent, the proverbial cake had thus already been baked. This switch of candidates offered a slightly cleaner slate, free from the noxious discourse around Biden's appearance, but Democrats ultimately gained little from this substitution other than new ways to shift around blame for a catastrophe preordained by their reticence to form a unified front and support the easily supportable.

This all begs the question: where do we go from here? The United States has changed significantly during the time I have been writing this five-part series, during which the new president has, largely uninhibited by the advisors that kept his first term from spiraling into doom, exhibited a remarkable authoritarian bent. It is thus more necessary than ever that his political opponents not only reflect on the numerous places where they have gone wrong, but develop plans of action that enable them to mount effective resistance at the ballot box.

I cannot realize an efficacious Democratic Party on my own; nor do I have the technical knowhow, I freely admit, to propose an achievable, robust and comprehensive policy package. I do know, however, that the issues I have enumerated—patronizingly misunderstanding racial minorities, allowing toxic incarnations of progressivism to drown out more productive strains, neglecting to cater toward offer promise to young male voters and failing to stand up for its own policies in the public sphere—cannot continue to manifest within a party that hopes one day to achieve political ascendancy without the aid of a worldwide pandemic.

There is a long road ahead. Time to get moving.

April 30, 2025

THE SPECTATOR'S

Ins & Outs

NICOLE GREENBERG '25

IN	OUT
Napping on Minor Field	Rotting in your bed for hours
Green-to-Go Containers	Battling for a McEwen or Commons table at 12:00 p.m.
Pretending you were at your friend's thesis presentation and getting mad they didn't see you	Abruptly running out of the room after your friend presents their thesis because you don't know the next person
Drinking coffee out of the new ice cream bowls	Ingesting microplastics by putting coffee in the dining hall cups
Skipping along the groad loop	Going for a run around the groad loop
Cooking eggs properly	Burning eggs at the egg station and acting like nothing is wrong
Stopping to take pictures of pretty things	General nonchalance

April 30, 2025

What's underlying in *The Underlying Chris?*

by Sylvia Woodbury '27
STAFF WRITER

PHOTO BY AMELIA BEAMISH

Sedaka '25 and Sollecito '25 both play one of the many figures of Chris in the play.

The reigning theme of Will Eno's 2019 play *The Underlying Chris*—fluidly staged by Hamilton's Theater Department as directed by Professor Craig Latrell—is rendered clear from the get-go. If not gleaned from a glance at the title, the message may be divined from the play's prologue, a whimsical précis masquerading as a monologue, imparted with verve: "It's a story about the moments that shape a life, and the people who shape a moment. And the things we don't have names for. The essence, I guess. The spirit." Get it? Don't worry if not—it'll be repeated.

The effectiveness of the play, which charts Chris's life from infancy to sedate funeral, hinges on an unconventional stylistic device: a rotating cast of actors variously inhabit various characters, so that Chris is played by different actors across different scenes, separated by intervals ranging from a few years to a swiftly-passing decade.

Narratively, the play adopts a fairly traditional birth-to-death plotline, distilling generic plot points from an agglomerate of tragic archetypes. Chris is orphaned at an early age and later adopted by benevolent guardians; in midlife, he/she commits the typical transgression and has an affair, later much regretted. We watch him/her transform, via a series of dissociated scenes, into a doddery, disoriented grandparent, confined to a nursing home. Then: the closed casket, the yawning grave. Some morose funeral-goers mill around contemplating mortality.

Though the play hits its narrative beats with precision—each scene is deftly written and integrated into the larger chronology of the play—Eno's controlled, measured portrait of a life entire is essentially ensured by his faithfulness to cliché. Each actor successfully reenacts enough of Chris's enduring attributes to unify the whole of play, while variations in age and gender (both within the text and enacted on stage) communicate that this one life is not only composed of multiple iterations and bodily forms, forever metamorphosing, but also that Chris's life could be any of our lives, and his most formative moments could turn out to resemble many of ours as well. It's an unfortunate truth, however, that generality so often fails to be universal.

PHOTO BY AMELIA BEAMISH

Chris's experiences simulate the stuff of novels more so than any particular reality; Eno's play may hold up a mirror, but it's not clear whether we, the audience, are reflected or if it simply reduplicates and amplifies hackneyed narrative conventions. The play's reliance on often sentimental bromides of dialogue and plot sometimes has the effect of minimizing the creativity of its premise.

Perhaps the most enticing aspect of the play is its diversity of actors—it was never clear who was going to appear next—and the expressiveness and pathos they conveyed. There was quite a bit of weeping by the close of the play. Here's a characteristic speech, recited by a funeral attendee: "It's quite an honor to be born, isn't it. And it takes some strength to live up to that honor. So, strength. And of course love."

There's a certain measure of cheeky—but mostly unexercised—angularity in the play's dialogue, replete with japes and witticisms; Eno might be a keen satirist if he weren't so eager to smooth over tragedy with speechifying. But a bumpier play—less polished and perfected, maybe even a little rougher around the edges—might have enlivened and animated themes that currently are all too inert.

April 30, 2025

NFL Draft recap: Why did Shedeur Sanders fall to the fifth round?

by Alex Wagner '28
SPORTS WRITER

Last Thursday, the 2025 NFL Draft got underway in Green Bay. Although this year's quarterback draft class was widely regarded as weaker than the high-profile prospects of 2024—such as Caleb Williams, Jayden Daniels and Drake Maye—it still delivered plenty of excitement and drama.

The biggest headline of the draft was Shedeur Sanders, NFL legend Deion Sanders' son, who at one point was a projected top-three overall pick, but fell to the fifth round and eventually became the 144th overall pick by the Cleveland Browns. In fact, many thought Sanders would get picked by the Browns in the first round, but Cleveland passed on the Colorado quarterback several times. In the previous round, Cleveland also selected one of Sanders' quarterback classmates, Dillon Gabriel.

Throughout the NFL Draft season, there seemed to be only two contenders for the first overall pick: Miami's Cam Ward and Sanders. With Cam Ward beating out Sanders after being drafted first overall by the Tennessee Titans, many still expected Sanders to get picked soon after. Not being drafted until the third day of the draft raised speculation from many analysts and fans. The main explanations that have circulated are Sanders' talent and his celebrity and controversial character.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TITANSIZED.COM

The Tennessee Titans selected Cam Ward with the first pick of the 2025 NFL Draft.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NPR.ORG

Shedeur Sanders, despite being projected as a top draft pick, fell to the fifth round.

Many analysts, including ESPN's Matt Miller, have critiqued Sanders' quarterback abilities, noting that he is not a true "first-round talent." In part, many agree that the Colorado quarterback lacked ideal first-round skills. For example, former Detroit Lions quarterback and ESPN analyst Dan Orlovsky harped on Sanders' lack of pocket awareness, often taking an excessive amount of sacks, sometimes knocking Colorado out of field goal range.

While many may agree he lacks certain first-round quarterback polish, the argument is that Sanders should not have fallen to the fifth round. Many attribute his historic fall in the draft to him being the son of Deion Sanders and the amount of leverage that Shedeur Sanders tried to create in the draft process. Many teams feared drafting Shedeur Sanders because of the concerns about his father potentially influencing his NFL career and leading to a situation where Deion Sanders would become the head coach if Shedeur Sanders struggled. Additionally, some felt that the potential for a family dynasty could be a distraction or a point of contention within the team.

There was also speculation that Sanders was trying to choose the team that drafts him by intentionally 'tanking' draft meetings with teams he did not desire to play for. For example, Sanders had a poor meeting with the New York Giants. Reportedly, Sanders was unprepared for an offensive install with head coach Brian Daboll, and when he was called out for it, a heated exchange took place; Daboll did not appreciate Sanders' attitude. The Giants took Ole Miss Quarterback Jaxson Dart in the first round. Ultimately, a combination of Sanders' questionable first-round talent and his distracting antics led him to fall all the way to the fifth round. However, rounds two and three averaged 7.5 million viewers, the second most-watched second day on record, and rounds 4-6 averaged 4.3 million viewers, making it the most-watched third day on record. Many assume the increased popularity of the later rounds this year was due to Shedeur Sanders waiting to be drafted—unfortunate for Sanders but great for the NFL.

Other notable draft news was the Jacksonville Jaguars trading up to the second overall pick to select two-way star and Heisman winner Travis Hunter. The Las Vegas Raiders selected running back Ashton Jeanty with the sixth overall pick. Many approve of Jeanty's skill set, but today's league does not value paying or prioritizing running backs due to their disposability, which is why many were surprised by the Raiders' pick. Also, many analysts considered the New England Patriots' draft to be one of the best, selecting Will Campbell to bolster their offensive line and picking Ohio State running back TreVeyon Henderson in the second round. The Patriots also selected Kobee Minor with the 257th and fianl draft pick, referred to as "Mr. Irrelevant."

April 30, 2025

Long-time Hamilton Athletic Director Jon Hind ’80 retires after eighteen years

by Caroline Cornely ’26
SPORTS EDITOR

Director of Athletics and Professor of Physical Education Jon Hind ’80 has announced his retirement, effective April 30, 2025. Hind has been Hamilton’s Director of Athletics since the summer of 2007. During his tenure as director, Hamilton women’s lacrosse captured the first NCAA team championship in athletic department history in 2008. Additionally, athletes from the men’s track & field, men’s cross country and women’s swimming teams have collected a number of individual national titles over his tenure.

Hind came to the Hill in 1976 as an opportunity program student from Henninger High School in Syracuse. Hind graduated from Hamilton in 1980 with a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics and Economics. He played football and lacrosse for the Continentals for all four years. On those teams, he won the department’s Jean-Marius Gelas Memorial Award as a senior. Hind was a four-year letter winner and two-time captain as a defenseman on the lacrosse team. While on campus, he also taught math and religion at St. Mary’s School in Clinton.

After graduating, Hind served as a part-time assistant coach for football and men’s lacrosse at Hamilton in 1980-81. He then started his full-time coaching career as a lacrosse coach, as the men’s team at the College of Wooster for five years. Hind then accepetd a job at Butler University and became the first head coach of the men’s lacrosse team in 1991. His Butler teams had just one losing season in seven years, and he was named the National Coach of the Year by the U.S. Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association in 1998 after leading the Bulldogs to the NCAA tournament. The following year, he switched to athletic administration and was the associate athletics director for operations at Butler with a focus on management responsibilities in marketing and promotions. In 2005, he was promoted to a position overseeing the department’s event management, facilities and budget. From May through August 2006, Hind served as Butler’s interim athletic director.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMILTON COLLEGE

Jon Hind ’80 (middle) hanging out with friends on campus in the 1980 Hamilton Yearbook.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMILTON ATHLETICS

Jon Hind ’80, the Director of Athletics and Professor of Physical Education, retires.

During his tenure on College Hill, Hind led the College’s efforts to integrate fully into NESCAC play, effective by the 2011-12 academic year. He subsequently supported the work of a trustee committee whose goal was an intercollegiate athletics program that provided students with facilities, infrastructure and teams that are competitive within NESCAC.

While acting as Hamilton’s Director of Athletics, Hind upgraded nearly all of the College’s athletic facilities. Under his leadership, new facilities for baseball and softball (Loop Road Athletic Complex), field hockey (Goodfriend Field) and men’s and women’s tennis (Tietje Family Tennis Center) were built. He has oversaw the construction of the Bob Simon Golf Center, the addition of new locker rooms in the Delaney Team Center and the construction of Henry W. Harding Field House, a large indoor practice facility with artificial grass and a state-of-the-art batting cage.

Furthermore, since Hind arrived at Hamilton, Steuben Field and Withiam Field replaced their surfaces with artificial grass, and in 2019 Love Field received a new natural grass surface and drainage. Margaret Bundy Scott Field House has refurbished seating for the basketball and volleyball teams and the indoor track was resurfaced. The Alumni Gym underwent extensive renovation during the summer of 2019. The Bristol Pool went through a $12.8 million renovation from March 2022 to February 2023, and the Russell Sage Rink is currently undergoing updates thanks to a $13 million investment by the College.

Deidre Pierson, an Associate Director who has worked with Jon for the past five years, will step in as Interim Athletic Director while the college prepares to launch a national search, assisted by a search firm which will do an initial review and be assessed by the department in order to fill the position permanently.